

A Journey Down The Lane In Past Memories
Rohinton Mistry's Aspects of Immigration

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Abstract

Rohinton Mistry was born and brought up in Mumbai in the mid fifty's, migrated to Canada at the age of 23. Mistry belongs to that class of the Indian authors who shifted their base from India to somewhere else but throughout their lives continue missing their mother land. We can easily recall a beautiful song of the movie "Namste London" which says "Main Jahan rahoon main kahin bhi rahoon Teri yaad saath he" means "where ever I am but your memories are always there with me."

The acute pain and feeling of not being with the people who are like you, who speaks your language can be better , felt and expressed by exiled or immigrant writers . Such people might be physically away from their own motherland but deep in their hearts always keep on missing their motherland.

According to Hudson "A nation's life has its moods of exultation and depression, its epochs a strong faith and strenuous idealism now of doubt struggle and disillusion, now of unbelief and flippant disregard for the sanctities of existence and while the manner of expression will vary greatly with the individuality of each writer the dominant spirit of the hour whatever they may be will directly or indirectly reveal itself in his work". (1)

According to Goethe's statement "Everyman is the citizen of his age as well as of his country." (2) The impact and influence of the age, psyche, cultural heritage and political up down

on the Author's mind is due to the fact that later is constantly influenced by the spirit of all above fastness and reacts to it vividly and vigorously.

Although he left India in 1975 and does not often go back, Mistry told a British Magazine that he feels no hindrance in writing about this home country "So far I have had no difficulty writing about it, even though I have been away for so long", he said "All fiction relies on the real world in the sense that we all face in the world through our five senses and we accumulate details, consciously or subconsciously. This accumulation of debt can be drawn on when you write fiction. (3) The beauty and delicacy with which Mistry has portrayed the experience of immigration, the immense pain of not being with your own people, no author has done it so far. Although Mistry confesses in the Literary Journal Rungh (1993) that his departure from India was partly encouraged by the expectations of his peers, especially of his generations. "After finishing college in Bombay or elsewhere in India, one had to go abroad for higher studies. If possible one had to find a job after finishing a Masters or a PhD in the states or in England, find a job and settle in the country. That's how success is defined by Indians, so that is why I say that coming to Canada was in some ways decided for me". (4) Some of the lines from the recent novel of Rohinton Mistry's "Family Matters" says about the aspect of immigration as a wrong and painful decision, the protagonist Nariman Vakeel during a conversation with his son in law Yezad, express his happiness on Yezad's decision of not going to Canada.

"I am glad you did not" repeated Nariman" because I think immigration is an enormous mistake, the biggest any one can make in their life. The loss of house leaves a hole that never fills." This father in law's words brought a lump on his throat, reminding him to Mr. Kapoor's photograph's of Jehanger Mansion and Hughes road his lost house. That feeling returned of grief and emotions and a strange calm". (5)

Mistry is a writer with a great and strong power of imagination and deep insight into the human psyche, even all the political updown and social scenario is painted with all realism by Mistry. He is such an artist with pen that he has poured all his emotions on paper with all the reality into it, be it the political affairs of India, or the religious issues. A scene from "Family Matters" where the conversation between a middle class family in India about the corruption in the Government shows Mistry's grip over Indian political affairs. "Corruption is in the air we

breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people into crooks” Right chief. “The answer, unfortunately is Yes” “The country has gone to the dogs and not well bred dogs either but pariahs” “May be the BJP and ShivSena coalition will improve the things “said Jal ‘we should give them a chance” Yezad laughed “If a poisonous snake was in front of you, would you give it a chance ?These two parties encouraged the Hindutva extremists to destroy the Babri Mosque?(6) In the above lines theprotagonist of the novel Nariman Vakeel discusses with his son in law Yezad and son Gael about the corruption and irregularities in the government.

Mistry has mastered not only the art of weaving and knitting nostalgic memories like many of exiled authors of his time and genre are having but at the same time he has a smart sense, he is sharp enough to capture all the social, political events and incidents taking place in India even if he was not present here at that time. All the characters of Mistry speak his heart . The few of the examples we can quote for displaying the feeling of dissatisfaction of Mistry and at the same time the true picture of Indian psyche fighting for the sake of religion but not for the country:-

“Hell has ways of permeating heaven’s membrane” He began softly “Heaven, I’m in heaven” which irritated Coomey even more, and he stopped humming. Just think back to the Babri Mosque riots.” “You’re right”, conceded Jal sometimes hell does seep through.”You’re agreeing with his silly examples? Said Coomey indignantly. (7) Rohinton Mistry is a Canada based Indian writer who continues to write about India his homeland ever when he is thousands of kilometers away from it.In his latest, most recent Novel “Family Matters” he again tries to revise the memories of his home country, his community (Parsi) his family, his people. The present paper deals with this nostalgic perspective of the social political scene of India.

It is a well crafted and drafted story where Rohinton Mistry chronicles the troubles of the Parsi community which proud community struggling to meet the demands imposed on there by the suburban jungles of Bombay.The central character in the story is Nariman Vakeel a 79 year old retired English Profession. Who lives in a dilapidated server room house with Jal and Coomey, his middle-aged unmarried stepchildren Roxana, his daughter, likes with her husband Yazad and kids Jehangir and Murad some distance away.In this novel Nariman’s memories of the past expose the reader to earlier moments in the city’s, and the nation’s history in a novel that moves across three generations of the same family.

Mistry has concentrated on the pessimistic image of his lost motherland give an insight into urban India and mentions the vexation faced by we middle class people in India. The writer presents a cross section of Bombay- In “family matters” the patroganist Nariman Vakeel who is fond of taking evening walks is always having to face the resistance by his step children Gael and Coomey. Ever with my healthy legs, Pappa walking is a hazard” said Jal continuing the daily fuss over his stepfather’s outing.

“Shoes without socked? Like a Pathan said Coomey “and see how your hands are shaking” you can’t even tie laces.”“Yes, you could help me.”“Happily – if you were going somewhere important like the doctor, or fire temple for Mamma’s prayer. But I won’t encourage foolishness. How many people with perkins’s do what you do? I am not trekking in Nepal. A little stroll down the lane that’s all.(8)

Through the walls of Nariman Vakeel the central character of this novel, Mistry wants to portray the whole scene of a busy road in Mumbai. Some of the pieces in family matters which describes the road side picture.“With his umbrella, which he used as a walking stick, Nariman Vakeel emerged from Chateau felicity. The bustling life was like air to starving lungs after the stale emptiness of the flat.

He went to the lane where the vegetable vendors congregated their baskets and boxes, overflowing with greens and legumes and fruits and tubers, transformed the corner into a garden. French beans, Sweet potatoes coriander, green chilies, cabbages, cauliflower bloomed under the street lights, hallowing the dusk with their color and fragrance. From time to time, he bent down to touch. Voluptuous onions and glistening tomatoes enticed his fingers the purple brinjal and earthy carrots were irresistible. The subjivalas know he wasn’t going to buy anything but they did not mind and he liked to think they understood why he came.

In the flower stall two men sat like musicians, weakling strands of marigold, garlands of jasmine and lily and rose their fingers picking, plucking, knotting, playing a floral melody. The bhel-puri stall was a sculptured landscape with its golden pyramid of sev the snow mountains of murmura hillocks of puris an, in among their valleys, in aluminum containers, pools of green and brown and red chutneys.

A man selling bananas strolled up and down the street. The bunches were stacked high and heavy up on his outstretched arm, a balancing and strong man act rolled into one. It was all

magical as a circus. Felt Nariman, and reassuring, like a magical show.(9) Mistry's description of sabjivallas and phool wallas secures to be so realistic as if he has just passed away from those streets and the smell of those vegetables, fruits , flowers and Bhel puris is still with him.

Although A/c to Rushdie any writer who writes about his homeland from the outside, must necessarily "deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost (Rushdie). (10) And it seems that the expatriate writer has to work harder than the native writer to create authenticity.

But as far as Mistry is concerned for him these fragments of memory were great enough to recapture the time he has spend on the streets of Bombay, the moments lived with him are being relieved by him during this depiction of his homeland. Even at one phase, the fiction of Rohinton Mistry seems to have a nostalgic look at the community he has left behind.

His novels are concerned with the experience of the Parsi in India so along with cherishing the partial memories of his own country (India) Mistry keeps on smoothen his inner self by writing about his own community (Parsi). Mistry has a vision that involves both the community centered existence of the Parsi's and their involvement with the wider national framework.

As we can see in his another piece of fiction "Such a Long Journey" the main action of the story revolves around the Parsi community of Khodadad Building along with pure Indian Background. During the journey of reading "Such a Long Journey" the reader strongly feels that Mistry has started recognizing the importance of religion and rituals and ritual ceremonies in the construction of human identity. A similar projection of human emotions, psyche, religious rituals and struggle is also depicted in his next venture "A fine Balance."

"A Fine Balance" is the story that tells, how four characters – Dina Dalal, Om, Ishvar Darji and Maneck Kowah – come together to live in the madness of Bombay. Mistry as a painter, paints beautifully with all the dark colours the tragic beauty of the city of Bombay and even peeps deep in to the rural horrors of India's oppressive caste system. Even in an interview with Rober Mc hay he talks about this novel:-

"After writing my first two books, I became aware that they were stories about a very particular and very special kind of city, and even then I had focused only on a very Swale part – the Parsi community and I made a conscious decision in this book to include more than this, mainly because, in India, seventy five percent of Indians live in villages and I wanted to embrace more

of the social reality of India. And so I made the tailors come from a small village and Maneck come from a hill station in the North. So while this city is certainly important, I wanted to give a strong sense of the different locales and I wanted to root the reader in those places so that he has a very clear sense of where these people are coming from and what their difficulties are now” (11) (Nandini Bhautoo – Dewnarain). Through his every character Mistry relives his own true that he has spent on the streets of Bombay (INDIA) his mother land.

In “Such a Long Journey” Gustad is nostalgic about the past, the happy carefree days of his childhood, the family gatherings, the holidays and the rich smell of his father's carpentry business, the personal grief and nostalgia helps Mistry with deeper and sharper his vision and giving the layers of intensity to every character Mistry is shaping up or framing in his novels. The chronological journey of Mistry's various works of fiction shows an interesting gradual movement towards the contemporary.

“Such a long Journey” has a background set up of the early 1970s during the war against Pakistan. In “A fine Balance” the figure of India Gandhi and political rhetoric have a direct impact on the lives of the four main characters of the novel. “Family Matters” depicts and deaths. with the India of the 1990s where Hindutva ideologies and his repercussions on the life of common ordinary citizens of India, can be seen. Mistry is simultaneously a writer of the diaspora through his writing on India do not work only with the traditional diasporic themes of nostalgia for motherland he also has a sense of exile.

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